

Friends & Neighbours

A play in one act

Written by Ron Nicol

Spotlight Publications

Friends & Neighbours

CAST (in order of appearance)

Fraser, the leader of an inner-city gang
Bugs, his loyal supporter
Lexy, Rab's former girl-friend
Rab, a member of the gang
Delia, an English girl, a newcomer to the city
The Victims, non-speaking

Setting: A city somewhere in Scotland. An open stage should suggest various locations: perhaps a city centre street flanked on one side by a run-down play area with broken swings and a slide, and on the other by an open space outside a night club or dance hall with pavement café style benches or metal chairs and tables. Most of the action takes place in the early evening or late at night, with the light coming from street lamps, shop windows, neon signs and advertising hoardings. Perhaps the monologues could be given under a lamp at the corner of the street.

Time: Now

"Friends and Neighbours" was a prize-winner in the Youth Section of the Scottish Community Drama Association's *Play on Words 2004* playwriting competition, and was first produced by Queen Victoria School, Dunblane at the Howden Park Centre, Livingston on 6th November 2004, with the following cast:

Fraser James Hobson
Bugs Dane Conneely
Lexy Helen McMillan
Lexy Finlay Smith
Delia Fay McIntyre

Director Alan Kirk

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The lights come up very slowly on a city street at night, and we hear the sound of a police car siren. Offstage the car arrives - doors slam, shouts, running feet, police radios fading away. Bugs and Fraser enter, dishevelled and breathing heavily

Fraser Boy, that was close! Yon fat pig had me by the arm.

Bugs How'd you get away?

Fraser Wriggled out my jacket, like. Left it behind. Should've seen his face, Bugs. Still holding my jacket and I was away down the close. No problem.

Bugs You'd nothing in it, Frazee? They'd not know it's yours?

Fraser What you take me for, man? It's clean. Lifted it from the shopping centre yesterday. They can't identify you - and it's ace taking it in the first place. Like lifting a getaway car for a raid. Gives you a buzz.

Lexy enters, unseen by them, and stands watching

Bugs Hey, how if the pigs find a pile of new jackets left behind every time! Our trademark, like. See the headlines! "Gang fades into shadows, leaving only jackets behind."

Fraser Empty jackets. "Leaving empty jackets..." (*Fired with the idea*) We could get the same stuff! Same jackets.

Bugs Aye! Like my Granda wore. We could be the Checkit Jaicket Gang!

Fraser I'd be Fraser the Razor! The guy who slices 'em up! Like the old razor gangs.

Bugs Hey no! Get up to date, man. Fraser the Eraser! He rubs 'em out!

Fraser Aye, that's it! The Terminator! That's me!

Bugs And I'll be Ross - the Boss. Hasta la vista, baby! I'll be back!

Lexy steps forward. They're embarrassed to see her

Lexy I don't believe the crap you talk when I'm not here. Empty jackets! Empty heads more like. Checkit Jaicket Gang! That's pants! You should hear yourselves. Wee kids playing Cowboys and Indians!

Fraser You'd be the cow, by the way!

Lexy Funny man, eh, Frazee? You should be on the telly. When you gonny grow up, the pair of you. And what's this about Ross, Bugs?

Bugs I can call myself Ross if I want.

Lexy You've aye been Bugs to me, so that's how it's gonny stay.

Fraser Why're you called Bugs anyway?

Bugs It doesn't matter.

Lexy It does so. I've known you years and never thought about it.

Bugs You should know, Lex. It was the glasses. I'd they big round ones. There was this film or something when I started school. Monsters from Outer Space. With big eyes.

Lexy You mean some eejit said you looked like a bug-eyed monster?

Bugs Aye! *You* did!

Lexy Aye, right enough, so I did! What a laugh, eh?

Bugs It's no! I'm the one stuck with it.

Lexy Poor wee Muppet. It was only a joke, like.

Bugs No such a joke now, but! Mam's the only one uses my real name. My Da's the worst. Calls me Bugs. Laughs when I don't like it. Even the teachers call me Bugs. Every time Mam went up on parents' night they'd no idea who she meant when she asked about Ross!

Fraser Least you're no like that eejit Ross in 'Friends'. What a prat, eh! Who'd be him? That's it by the way. Fraser the Terminator - and the wee Bug-eyed Monster!

Bugs Shut it! I wish I'd never said.

Lexy What about me, Bugs? Who'd I be?

Bugs Who else? Sexy Lexy.

Fraser Drops her knickers for anybody.

Lexy Watch it you!

Bugs I like it. Sexy Lexy.

Fraser Yeah. Everybody knows you fancy her.

Bugs I do not!

Lexy You do so!

Fraser Been hanging round her since primary. Hoping for a snog.

Lexy No chance, Bugs. No even a totty wee snogette!

Lexy and Fraser exit. Bugs turns to the audience. The light fades to a spot

Bugs So? Anyway, that was us. OK - we were like kids. I mean, that crap bit between being kids and being grown-up. At the same school - me and Frazee and Lexy and Rab. Just sort of got together. No much to do. The usual - shop-lifting, breaking into cars, thieving. Everybody does it, eh? Frazee broke into a few places, though. Took everything. Everything not screwed down, like. Didn't sell it on, just smashed it up or threw it away if he couldn't use it himself. There'd been a bit of aggro, but we didn't mean any harm. No real violence. Not then. Thing is, once it starts it gets worse. It just sort of grew. What happened to Rab was my fault, really, but I didn't know it would happen. Not then...

The spot fades as he steps back and watches. Early evening lighting comes up as Fraser, Lexy and Rab enter the play area. Bugs joins them after the dialogue has become established

Fraser My Dad says they migrants come here and get benefit straight off.

Bugs Take all the jobs.

Lexy I thought they wasn't allowed to work.

Fraser That's crap, man. Course they work. Just don't tell anybody, like.

Lexy Don't pay taxes or that.

Fraser Look, Lexy, that time I went to London - you couldn't move for blackies. They're all over the place. It'll be like that up here, next. Taking the jobs.

Lexy Blacks aren't immigrants. Loads was born here. They're no all asylum seekers, by the way. Asylum seekers aren't black - no all of them...

Fraser They don't belong here. Immigrants, darkies, asylum seekers - they're all the same. Taking all they can get. Given money down south soon as they arrive, then sent up here so the English don't have to put up with them. Right idea, eh? Like in America - South Africa - keep 'em out the way, like. Separate places for whites and blacks.

Lexy They can't do that any more, Frazee. It's illegal. They've to treat them all equal.

Fraser How? They're no the same. Second class citizens. Dum dums. Not as intelligent as us. No even wee Bugs there.

Bugs Hey!

Lexy They are so. This black kid from school says his dad's a scientist up the Uni!

Fraser He's having you on. They've just come down from the trees. There's no schools in the jungle, so how'd he learn to read and write - let alone be a scientist, by the way?

Lexy Mebbe he went to Uni himself. Some of them are right educated.

Bugs There's loads in the hospitals - doctors and nurses and that.

Fraser How'd you know they're doing the right thing, though? Can't understand half of them. Jabbering away. How'd you know what they're up to?

Lexy Some of them are specialists - they must know what they're doing.

Fraser Wouldn't want them touching you, but.

Lexy If you were ill you wouldn't care, would you? You'd do anything to get better.

Fraser Sticking up for them, Lexy? Fancy one, eh? Got a big black stud somewhere?

Lexy Shut it, Fraser. I can't stand them, right?

Fraser Bet you'd change if one of them fancied you, eh? You'd be gagging for it then!

Fraser exits, laughing, followed by Bugs. Lexy gestures after them, then turns to the audience as the lighting fades to a spot

Lexy I'd heard all this stuff about asylum seekers, right, but I didn't know enough about it. It's the government should deal with it, I mean, it's their problem. There was people from other countries at the school - they was OK, I suppose, but Fraser seemed to know what he was talking about, so I just went along with it. Calling names and that. Graffiti. Dog crap through their letter boxes. That's OK, right? I

mean, it doesn't hurt, eh? Don't get me wrong, I've nothing against them. They can come if they like, long as they don't expect me to be friends with them. There was this Palestine boy fancied me once. Hung round all the time. I didn't want to know. I mean, he wasn't much to look at. Then he got beat up - never saw him again. I'd no idea it was Fraser done it till after. I was sorry for the guy. I'd been going round with Rab - but he'd met somebody else...

The spot fades as she steps back and watches. Lighting is restored - evening outside a night club or dance hall. Music plays in the background as Delia enters, drinks from a bottle of water, takes out a mobile phone and checks her text messages. Rab enters and watches, until eventually she turns to him

Delia Like the view? Or are you just going to throw up. If you are - do it somewhere else.

Rab *(taken aback)* No, I was just...

Delia I know what you were just - you were just standing there.

Rab I'm just - looking.

Delia Window shopping. *(She poses)* See anything you like?

Rab Looks good from here. I was just - I mean, I was wondering where I've seen you before.

Delia Inside. About an hour ago. You've been hanging round for ages. Watching me with your eyes out on stalks. Well? Now you've plucked up courage - what do you want?

Rab *(confused by her directness)* I was just wondering, like, where I'd seen you. *(Realises he's already used that line)* I mean - um - do you come here often?

Delia Now there's an original chat-up line!

Rab No, it's - well, I - what's your name?

Delia Slightly better, I suppose. Still not original, though. I'm Cordelia.

Rab Cordelia?

Delia Sorry. Didn't realise you were deaf.

Rab I'm not. I just thought - you're not from round here, then.

Delia Put you off, does it? The accent. Some people find it hard to understand, apparently. They like taking the mick.

Rab Eh?

Delia Taking the mickey. Make fun of my accent, then they get the name, and - well, you know. I prefer Delia.

Rab It's - Cordelia - it's a nice name. Unusual. Up here, I mean.

Delia It would be. Not many Cordelias around anywhere, are there? I could kill my mother. She was into Shakespeare when I was born.

Rab My Mum's into Burns. Christened me Robert - calls me Rabbie. Rab for short.

Delia Don't hear that a lot either - not down south.

Rab Something we've in common. Shakespeare and Burns. Big name writers. Up here long?

Delia Long enough to know you don't all run round in kilts and bare feet. That civilisation doesn't stop at the border. Though you can't be sure in some parts.

Rab How?

Delia Some of the natives can be pretty uncouth, can't they?

Rab What d'you mean - uncouth?

Delia You've really got a problem, haven't you? Repeating everything I say. Uncouth. You know, a bit rough?

Rab I know what uncouth means. You mean we live in caves. Like we're thick.

Delia No, I mean a bit - well - rude, really.

Rab You're the one with the problem. Here ten minutes and you're slagging us off. What d'you know about Scotland anyway? How long've you lived here?

Delia A few months. Long enough to know I don't think much of it.

Rab Better get back to my wee cave, then, eh? Watch the spiders climbing the walls.

Delia Wait. Look, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to get stropky. I've had a bit of a hard time since I got here. Some people don't like the English, you know? I've taken a bit of stick from one or two. I only have to open my mouth and they're taking the piss. You know, people at school - some of the neighbours.

Rab I'm sorry.

Delia It's not your fault.

Friends and Neighbours

Plot Summary

Fraser is the ultimate bully, leading his teenage gang in racist attacks and hounding anyone who dares to stand up to him. Rab, a more moderate member of the gang, meets Delia, an English girl who encourages him to challenge Fraser's racist views. Bugs and Lexy, Rab's ex-girlfriend, are forced to examine their own beliefs when Fraser stabs an immigrant. Thinking Rab has betrayed him to the police, Fraser wants revenge, and rushes headlong towards confrontation and tragedy.

“... an excellent play with a very strong message and a terrifying ending.” - **Scene**

Running time: 30 minutes